

1 Justice in an Evolutionary context

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Opening Reflection/ Prayer:

2 On this Ash Wednesday when we also celebrate Valentine’s Day, 3 let us recall the fire of the Creator’s love which exploded almost 14 billion years ago, seeding a universe with relatedness. (pause)

4 We share with other living beings the building blocks of life. As astrophysicist Neil De Grasse Tyson writes: 5 *“The atoms of our bodies are traceable to stars that manufactured them in their cores and exploded these enriched ingredients across our galaxy, billions of years ago. For this reason we are biologically connected to every other living thing in the world. We are chemically connected to all molecules on Earth. 6 We are atomically connected to all atoms in the universe. We are not figuratively, but literally stardust.”*

7 As we begin this Lenten season when we strive to examine our consciousness –strive to grow in the conviction of our relatedness, and repent those words and deeds that betray our inherent one-ness, let us remember that we, and all creation, are made of stardust.

8 Let us carry the transforming power of the Creator’s loving energy with us this Lent and always. Let us commit to releasing the transforming message and power of our relatedness in all places where divisions and discord abide.

Amen.

9 Over the last decade or so, we’ve been striving to understand and integrate the insights that have been coming to us from the science and the theology of evolution and quantum physics. The impact of these insights cannot be understated as they have been animating within and among many of us women religious, our associates and colleagues, a profound and fresh experience of God and deeper appreciation for the beauty, dynamics, wisdom, and mystery embedded in creation.

10 Catholic Systematic Theologians, Feminist theologians, Eco theologians, Moral Theologians and Liturgical Theologians are using, with greater and greater dexterity, the interpretative lens of evolution to illuminate for us new dimensions of the mystery who is God. Books are abounding concerning how the Christ, the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, Christian-Catholic tradition, Spirituality and Worship can be understood and engaged anew through the lens of the evolutionary context.

Like wearing new glasses, it takes time and effort to get comfortable and feel somewhat secure with this “new-to-us lens,” of the evolutionary context which has implications for our seeing, understanding, and acting within our world. For that reason I am sure we all appreciate the many books, workshops, webinars, videos and prayers that are being offered, as well as opportunities like this zoom call, where we can share and explore together some of the insights and understandings coming to us in this moment of our time, from evolutionary science and theology.

11 My topic for this zoom call is about social justice in an evolutionary context. It's an important topic to us because in many ways, women religious, and our networks of associates, friends and colleagues are among a critical and growing mass of people who are committed to carry and nurture evolutionary consciousness in our world. Similarly women religious have, over the last half century or so, been significant contributors to social justice at local and global levels.

12 Our work to promote racial, gender, and sexual equality, justice for immigrants, migrants and refugees and the sustainability of planet earth is timely and on-going. So too is our work to advocate for policies and laws that address economic and healthcare disparities, basic human rights and integral human and community development. **13** These efforts have been making critical contributions to the evolution of justice in our world. Importantly, our justice work has been itself, has been a tangible indicator of our conscious evolution as women religious.

14 For example, if we think about it, it's not difficult for us to see that the mission focus of women religious has evolved, over the last 50 years or so, from mostly direct service or charity toward the men, women and child casualties of social injustice, to incorporating direct engagement with the systems, structures and policies that perpetuate and sustain injustice in human life and in the life of our planet.

15 In a similar way, it is also important for us to note that we, women religious, have evolved in our understanding of charism as being *our unique congregational identity* to an understanding of charism as a grace, a transforming power that emanates from the Creator- Spirit to energize and direct the mission that is common to all religious life, that is, co-creating with God a world conscious and committed to live the right-relatedness that is deeply embedded in all creation's DNA.

Both of these evolved understandings of religious life, are illustrative of how our conscious evolution as a lifeform has not only advanced an understanding of who we, but has also advanced an understanding of the transforming and evolving power of charism that we steward as well as the nature of the transforming work to which charism must be directed.

However, as evocative and renewing as has been the wisdom and insights given to us by contemporary scholars and writers who are using the lens of evolution, I have noticed a dearth of reflection in their writings on how evolutionary consciousness and conscious evolution impacts the way we understand and engage in the evolution of social justice . While some insights about the meaning and making of social justice in an evolutionary context are certainly implicit in our growing understanding of cosmology and the principles that guide the functioning of the universe and our planet, *social justice in an evolutionary context* is not easily found in the index of many of today's most important writings in evolutionary thought, and I am not alone, I am sure, in wondering about that!

So for now, it seems the best we can do in paving the way toward engaging the topic of "*social justice in an evolutionary context*," is by exploring this important topic together, talking about it, raising

questions, sharing insights, and being willing to open up dialogues about it wherever and whenever we can.

Despite, as I have already mentioned, the general lack of scholarly engagement on this topic, I recently came across an article by Ilia Delio in *NCR's Global Sisters Report*, Aug. 30, 2017, in which she offered this brief reflection on social justice in an evolutionary context. While initially, her engagement with the question of “what about social justice ?,” almost seems dismissive, I’d invite you to look discerningly at what she offers because it is clearly an invitation and perhaps a challenge to us about how we might think anew about justice-making in our ever evolving context. She writes,

16*For all that is right about social justice, there is something deeply amiss. Somehow, we feel that by making social justice a primary object of concern, things will eventually get better. What I want to suggest here is **unless we assume a different viewpoint, things will get worse.** The problem with social justice is that we have made it a human work when in fact social justice is, in as sense, a definition of nature itself. Social justice cannot exist as an independent phenomenon because it is the underlying principle of all phenomena. By highlighting social justice as a particular area of concern, we unwittingly confess our deep disconnect from nature. If justice is a principle of nature, then we need a new type of religion consonant with nature, one that elucidates the justice of nature itself. Anything else will not work. **17** As Albert Einstein once quipped, ‘you cannot solve a problem with the same conditions that created it.’*

18 As our sister Ilia cautions us that social justice must not become disconnected from nature, it does not appear that she is criticizing a perceived overemphasis in our work, on social concerns or human rights to the detriment or disregard for the integrity of creation. Rather, what she is pointing to here is the need to incorporate, into our justice work, inputs and strategies to address the anthropocentric, dualistic and hierarchical worldview that has shaped human consciousness to date—a worldview that is responsible for much of the violence and injustice toward one another and toward Earth that we are striving to transform today.

19 I read Ilia Delio’s remarks as a plea and a challenge to incorporate into our work of transforming social structures, systems and policies, the work of transforming the structures of human consciousness. I think this challenge deserves our attention and engagement for even now, we find ourselves staggering and stunned by the devastating impact that a single myopic, self-centered, and distorted consciousness can have on a nation, the world community, the most vulnerable of our species and our fragile planet. For justice to flourish, human consciousness – an awareness of who we are, where we are, how we are related to all, and why we are here, has to undergo transformation.

Steve McIntosh, author of the book [Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution](#) , reinforced this idea when he said: “*We might say that every problem in the world today is first and foremost a problem of consciousness.*” In my mind McIntosh not only underscores how critically important is including the work of transforming consciousness into our social justice work, but his words also

remind us that this call to a transformed consciousness is at the heart of all religions, conveyed in the preaching of their great prophets including Jesus of Nazareth. However, the efforts to integrate in our justice work strategies to nurture the transformation in human consciousness has not always been consistent ; now this work must be more intentionally engaged. As Delio suggests this work must be guided by the principles operative in the created order itself if we are to make a meaningful and sustainable contribution to the work of human, social and planetary transformation that must come about.

20 For me two of the of the key principles operative in creation that need to be cultivated in our social justice work if it is to be effective in shifting worldviews and transforming human consciousness are the principles of:

- Creation’s intrinsic UNITY and
- Creation’s Evolutionary and expanding nature.

First, The principle of Unity:

21 The Universe as well as the earth itself is a UNITY—an interacting, evolving, and genetically-related community of being bound together inseparably in space and time.

Our responsibility to each other and to all of creation is implicit in this UNITY. Each of us is profoundly connected to the functioning and fate of every other being on the planet and ultimately, perhaps, throughout the universe. **22** One of my favorite characters in all literature, Shug Avery expressed her consciousness of this principle in The Color Purple: *“One day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. I came to understand, that if a cut a tree, my arm would bleed.”*

23 Similarly, the “butterfly effect *“the notion that when a butterfly flaps its wings in one part of the world, it causes a hurricane in another,”* is another reminder of how intrinsically connected is everything in this universe and planet.

24 In my mind, our founder, Dominic Guzman was unusually attuned to this implicit relatedness and basic UNITY inherent in the divine design for creation. For this reason, he founded an Order to dismantle the Albigensian heresy that espoused the dualistic/separatist worldview and called his Order, “a Family” and sent us forth to witness to the relatedness of one and all.

Mystics and contemplatives have been finely tuned to this oneness; their insights, reflections and poetry have much to offer us by way of resources to cultivate the consciousness of oneness today. For example Thomas Merton offered us this insight:

25 *“We are already one but we imagine that we are not! What we have to discover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we already are.”*

Teilhard wrote: "We are one; after all, you and I. Together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other."

The Buddha said: "(The one) who experiences the unity of life sees (their) own self in all beings."

Beatrice Bruteau writes of "communion consciousness" as the only effective antidote to the domination paradigm which is at the root of so much suffering and injustice today.

Jesus prayed: "May they be One."

26 Ignorance and denial of our intrinsic relatedness and oneness is the perpetrator of much of the harm we do to each other and to our planet. Think of the present challenges we are facing to bring about justice for immigrants and safe harbor for refugees. Are these obstructive mindsets and policies not a manifestation of our ignorance and denial of our intrinsic relatedness- our responsibility toward all to whom we belong? Think of crimes committed against our planet because we remain ignorant of how our well-being is intimately connected to Earth's.

As women religious who are promoters of justice, we must explore ways of awakening in ourselves and others the consciousness of our relatedness to each other and to Earth so as to act with right-relatedness toward all.

When I think about my own work as a *promoter of justice in an evolutionary context* I admit that I am challenged to make a change. I know I must move beyond my own past practices of narrating what it is that my constituencies need to know about the latest injustice and how to engage in advocacy around it. More and more I am recognizing that incorporating more inputs, contemplative time, reflections, poetry, art, and experiences that help cultivate and nurture the consciousness of oneness and intrinsic relatedness, might be the specific contribution I can make as a woman religious in my coalition work and with the constituencies with whom I work.

27 The Second Principle: The evolutionary and expanding nature of Creation

The second principle operative in creation that I believe needs to be cultivated in our social justice work if it is to be effective in shifting worldviews and transforming human consciousness is the principle that everything in the Universe is evolving and expanding.

These days, in light of the changes and contrasts we are experiencing in U.S. governance and policies alone, how often do we hear ourselves or others moan, *"It feels like we are going backwards rather than forwards."* **28** While that's completely understandable, and in many ways true, the creation of which we are an intrinsic part is evolving, changing, and expanding to greater and greater levels of complexity. This is clearly illustrated in the New Universe Story narrative, derived from scientific observations. Similarly, the expansion of the universe has been empirically proven in the incredible speed in which galaxies are moving away from one another. The universe is on an expansion trajectory. In a book entitled From Teilhard to Omega, Ilia Delio also explains that that for Teilhard this universal evolution and expansion is not only happening in the universe but also happening within

all aspects of life. Evolution, therefore, is not merely an explanation of physical life but pertains to the dynamic active in culture, economics, society, institutions, religion, etc.

The human person is integrally part of evolution in that we rise from it, but we also have the capacity to reflect on it. Similarly, our lives depend on our capacity to expand our awareness, our understandings, and our thinking if we are to thrive in a universe wired in this way.

For me, these principles of evolution and expansion particularly found in the work of the Jesuit paleontologist and mystic Teilhard de Chardin compose a critical source for the spirituality of justice making today. **29** I find in the work of Teilhard de Chardin, some of the most inspiring and relevant insights that motivate me to remember that the universe is unfinished, wired toward hope, and will not succumb to the menace of despair. Everything in the universe is infused with the Spirit of God. Everything is moving, changing, transforming, despite setbacks, toward what Teilhard named as the ultimate Omega point of Universal Love.

30 *“Someday,” he wrote, “after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, (hu)man will have discovered fire.”*

31 *Teilhard reflected that as we, humans are in the expanding and evolving universe, the universe is also in us, expanding us toward greater and greater complexity in our consciousness and evolving us toward greater and greater unity. He envisioned the expansion and evolution in human consciousness as energized by the power of the Creator-Spirit’s love. He also envisioned that the expansion and evolution of human consciousness is moving us toward a universal consciousness. Although he could have never imagined the internet, Teilhard postulated that one day, there would be some mechanism for sharing and growing a universal consciousness across distances, languages and cultures. He called that universal consciousness the noosphere.*

All of us know the struggle to communicate and nurture the energy of hope in our work for justice. What inspires me in the work of Teilhard is the notion that the universe is energized in its evolution and expansion, by nothing less than the Creator’s spirit of love and, it is nothing less than the power of the Creator’s love that is drawing us into the future and toward oneness.

32 *Given this principle of the evolutionary and expanding nature of the universe, our work is not only to make love a tangible sign in the world through the creation of just policies, systems, structures and practices, but our work is also to help our constituencies discover the energy of love that not only has been released in the fire of creation but also moves through us now as a power to co-create with God a new creation. This, for me, is the essence and meaning of the hope we hold in our work. Hope for a more just and peaceful world lies in our awareness and conscious connection with the power of love moving us and all creation toward oneness and right-relatedness.*

33 I'd like to pause here and review a few of the slides I have offered so far in this presentation. I invite you to take a few moments reflecting on these slides, the images, the words as well as what you have been thinking, feeling so far in this presentation. Then we'll open the mikes for some sharing.

34 Summary: I think it's important to remember that we are not exactly starting from scratch in this work of integrating social justice work and the work of transforming human consciousness. Just think back at all the 'consciousness raising work' we have been doing across the last four or more decades. Each injustice around which we have worked, has involved growing awareness of the causes of the injustice while urging commitment to relationship and advocacy on behalf of those whose lives were negatively impacted by injustice. Also, in many important ways, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching such as the Dignity of the Human Person, the Common Good, the Option for the Poor, Care for Creation, have been very effective in supporting the evolution of an understanding we hold, that faith is not just a personal practice but faith is a "praxis"- requiring an active engagement with the social concerns of the day.

As we are learning, the evolution of human consciousness does not involve rejection or disassociation from the insights, worldviews, values, beliefs or practices of previous stages of our consciousness. Rather, evolution of consciousness integrates and builds upon all that has been previously learned, believed, valued as it strives to understand, and engage new realities that are emerging.

For example, the realization that our primary source of life, our planet, is becoming increasingly unstable and unsustainable because of human behavior, is slowly seeping into our human consciousness. While we remain committed to promoting the CST principles that support right-relationships among people, systems and societies, we are growing aware that we must consciously include and align ourselves with the principles that govern creation's sustainability. Unless we do so, social justice will become a moot point because the Earth and its systems are on a trajectory toward death. In the last few decades we have evolved from a consciousness that we are responsible for the way society functions to awareness that our species is earth become conscious and through the transformation of human consciousness the earth is striving to save herself.

35 In conclusion and by way of summary I'd like to reiterate that it seems evident that the evolution of social justice must integrate the work of social change with change in human consciousness. We are evolving as a species and there are indications that we are slowly coming to awareness that through our evolved consciousness, the Universe is moving toward the future and through our evolved consciousness, Earth is acting to save herself. The principles, strategies, and actions that have thus far supported our efforts to transform unjust systems, policies and structures, must now include the work of raising to conscious awareness the principles operative in the functioning of the evolution of the created order. To do this, we must make a conscious effort to practice wearing new lenses. We must commit to learning and integrating these principles, principally coming to us from the sciences, into our lives, worldview, spiritualities and theologies. As Audre Lorde, womanist poet and activist said, "The Masters tools will never dismantle the Masters house." To move into a new house, a new

consciousness, a new world order, we need new tools, a new approach, a new lens for seeing what has, thus far, not even been imaginable.

36 I'd like to close with the prayer-poem by Fred LaMotte . I hope you enjoy it

My Ancestry DNA Results Fred LaMotte

My Ancestry DNA results came in.
Just as I suspected, my great great grandfather
was a monarch butterfly.

Much of who I am is still wriggling under a stone.
I am part larva, but part hummingbird too.

There is dinosaur tar in my bone marrow.
My golden hair sprang out of a meadow in Palestine.

Genghis Khan is my fourth cousin,
but I didn't get his dimples.

My loins are loaded with banyan seeds from Sri Lanka,
but I descended from Ravanna, not Ram.

My uncle is a mastodon.
There are traces of white people in my saliva.

3.7 billion years ago I swirled in golden dust,
dreaming of a planet overgrown with lingams and yonis.

More recently, say 60,000 B.C.
I walked on hairy paws across a land bridge
joining Sweden to Botswana.

I am the bastard of the sun and moon.
I can no longer hide my heritage of raindrops and cougar scat.

I am made of your grandmother's tears.

You conquered rival tribesmen of your own color,
chained them together, marched them naked to the coast,

and sold them to colonials from Savannah.

I was that brother you sold, I was the slave trader,

I was the chain.

Admit it, you have wings, vast and golden,

like mine, like mine.

You have sweat, black and salty,

like mine, like mine.

You have secrets silently singing in your blood,

like mine, like mine.

Don't pretend that earth is not one family.

Don't pretend we never hung from the same branch.

Don't pretend we don't ripen on each other's breath.

Don't pretend we didn't come here to forgive.